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B **BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION**

by

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BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION

PRIME MINISTER Harold Macmillan's decision to ask British voters to give the Conservatives a new mandate on Oct. 8—more than seven months before an election would have been required by law¹—demonstrates his confidence in the party's current standing with the people. Announcement of the election date on Sept. 8 caught Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan, Labor Party leaders, in the midst of a sojourn in Moscow, but they hurried home to take command of the opposition's campaign preparations. The campaign proper will open after the present Parliament is dissolved on Sept. 18, barely three weeks in advance of the balloting.

A British government has the right to call a general election whenever its prospects at the polls seem favorable. Various events and developments have made the present time seem propitious to Macmillan and the Conservatives. Arrangement of the Eisenhower-Khrushchev visits appears to have brought a lull in the cold war and to have increased the likelihood of an eventual summit conference. Meanwhile, Great Britain's economy has climbed well out of the slump which gave it trouble last year and in the early months of this year. Macmillan has publicly claimed some of the credit for the better face of affairs both foreign and domestic, and opinion polls indicate that the public feels he is entitled to it.

INDICATED INCREASE OF CONSERVATIVE STRENGTH

The most recent polls have shown the Conservatives holding an edge of about 5½ percentage points over the Laborites, with the Liberals stronger than in other recent years but still trailing far behind. The British Gallup poll, reported in the *London News Chronicle* on Sept. 8, gave Conservatives 41½ per cent, Labor 36 per cent, and Liberals 8 per cent; 14 per cent expressed no opinion. A previous poll in mid-August had disclosed a sharp rise in

¹ A general election could have been put off until close to expiration of the maximum five-year life of the House of Commons elected on May 26, 1955.

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Macmillan's personal popularity. Sixty-seven per cent of those questioned, as against 54 per cent a month earlier, voiced general satisfaction with the Prime Minister's performance; 23 per cent indicated dissatisfaction in both polls; the proportion expressing no opinion dropped from 23 per cent in July to 10 per cent in August.

As the table on the opposite page shows, not since 1945, when the Labor Party unexpectedly overwhelmed Winston Churchill and the Conservatives, has a British general election been decided by as wide a margin as 3.5 percentage points. In the latest general election, in 1955, the Conservatives led the Laborites by 3.3 percentage points and won 344 seats in the House of Commons. David E. Butler, a leading expert on elections in the United Kingdom, has speculated that a swing of 1.5 per cent from Labor to Conservative would be sufficient to double the present Conservative margin of more than 60 seats. Labor, on the other hand, would need a swing of better than 2 per cent to gain an even split in Commons.²

Six months ago, it looked as if the Conservatives were heading for defeat or, at most, a narrow victory. The *News Chronicle* in March reported Labor out in front 36.5 per cent to 35.5 per cent for the Conservatives, with more than one-fifth of the poll participants undecided. In each of three by-elections that month to fill vacancies in Commons, Labor had gained votes though no seats changed hands. As recently as May, when the polls gave the Conservatives a paper-thin margin of 1 per cent, many Macmillan supporters were urging an immediate election. Local elections in the first week of May seemed to show that the Conservatives had recovered sharply from the political blow struck by the ill-starred Suez venture.³ During recent months both foreign and domestic developments seem to have favored the government of the day. As a result, what appeared to be Labor's most effective talking points have been at least partly neutralized.

Labor, however, has been pouring great sums of money

² David E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1955* (1955), p. 208. Vacancies and by-elections left the Conservatives with 339 seats, Labor with 278, at dissolution of Parliament. The Speaker, by custom considered without party, has been omitted from the above totals and is listed in the table among "Others." The present holder of the office is a Conservative and is counted as such in some computations of party strength.

³ In the May borough council elections the Conservatives gained a total of 321 seats and Labor lost a total of 379 seats. In May 1957, four months after Prime Minister Eden's resignation, Labor had picked up 204 borough council seats and the Conservatives had lost 178.

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POSTWAR ELECTIONS IN GREAT BRITAIN (Party strength in Commons and per cent of total vote won)

	1945		1950		1951		1955	
	No. of seats	% of vote	No. of seats	% of vote	No. of seats	% of vote	No. of seats	% of vote
Conservatives & associates	213	39.9	297	43.5	321	48.0	344	49.7
Labor	393	48.0	315	46.1	295	48.8	277	46.4
Liberals	12	9.0	10	9.1	6	2.5	6	2.7
Communists	2	0.4	0	0.3	0	0.1	0	0.1
Others	20	2.7	3	1.0	3	0.6	3	1.1
	640		625		625		630	

into party organization and propaganda—roughly 10 times what the party spent in 1955. For that reason, if no other, some persons think the vote will be closer than it was in 1955. Laborites like to recall the American election of 1948 in which President Truman confounded virtually all pollsters and prognosticators.

GAINS FROM MACMILLAN'S JOURNEY TO MOSCOW

The disastrous outcome for Britain of the Suez adventure in the autumn of 1956, coupled with Prime Minister Anthony Eden's resignation in January 1957, left the Conservative government and Macmillan, Eden's successor and one of his leading advisers, on the defensive. The government's hesitant reaction to Moscow's initial overtures a year later for a summit conference did not help to improve its position before the British public, then strongly enamored of the idea of military disengagement. The latter proposal, publicized by Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki of Poland, had been taken up and elaborated by British Labor Party leaders.

The turning point for the Conservatives seems to have come during the diplomatic sequel to Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum of November 1958. From the first, it was Macmillan among leaders of the Western alliance who appeared most inclined toward high-level negotiations with the Soviets. While the U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was making an extraordinary effort to preserve a united front for the protracted bargaining that seemed in prospect, Macmillan on Feb. 21 flew to Moscow for informal talks with Khrushchev. From the standpoint of British opinion, the significance of the journey to Russia was underlined by the fact that it was the first by a British

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prime minister since World War II. Before Macmillan left for Moscow, he explained that he wanted to "try to break the ice and also to get some feeling of the general situation."

The trip was not an unqualified success. Khrushchev in a broadcast talk on Feb. 24, while Macmillan was still in Russia, bluntly rejected Western proposals for a conference on Germany at the foreign ministers' level. "The Western powers probably want to bring us into a labyrinth of diplomatic negotiations so that we bog down for several years with numerous meetings, adjournments and so forth," the Soviet premier said. He demanded a summit parley.

Macmillan was reported stunned by the tone and content of Khrushchev's remarks, which seemed to most press observers deliberately rude. Nonetheless, he resumed conversations with Khrushchev, and the joint statement issued at the conclusion of the talks, March 3, suggested that some progress had been made. The statement announced that the two had "agreed that further study could usefully be made of the possibilities of increasing security by some method of limitation of forces and weapons, both conventional and nuclear, in an agreed area of Europe, coupled with an appropriate system of inspection." This was an approach to the Soviet-backed Rapacki denuclearization plan; for political purposes, it had the virtue of reaffirming the Conservative Party's deep concern about a question on which Labor had based a considerable part of its foreign policy position.⁴

Macmillan followed his Moscow visit by brief trips to Paris, Bonn, and Washington to press the case for a summit conference. By the end of March, the West had swung around to approving a foreign ministers' conference as a preliminary to a summit meeting. When the foreign ministers actually convened at Geneva in May, it was Macmillan who was generally credited with having brought them together. Macmillan later sought to associate himself with the Eisenhower-Khrushchev meetings and the hopes they have raised. His joint telecast with the President in London on Aug. 31 gave the Prime Minister opportunity to remind the British public of his own role in that connection:

I have felt there was a danger we might drift into something by mistake. . . . And that's why I set about my journeys last

⁴ See "Berlin Crisis and German Reunification," *E.R.R.*, 1968 Vol. II, pp. 973-975.

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February. Some people thought those a bit odd. But . . . in the alliance we still have a certain amount of play. And I think I'm bound to say that they haven't turned out too badly. . . . I've never concealed from you [President Eisenhower] I always have wanted a summit meeting and I believe your initiative will put us into position to get it under the best conditions.

It was made known in London the following day that Eisenhower had not gone along with Macmillan's urgings for an early summit conference. But continued American insistence on greater advance promise of East-West agreement at a top-level meeting was not expected to impair Macmillan's political position. The theme the Conservatives will use in the election campaign will no doubt closely approximate the Prime Minister's statement of Aug. 3: "Last November we were talking in terms of threats and ultimata. Now we are talking in terms of personal visits and discussions. All this is a great gain in the cause of peace."

BENEFITS FROM IMPROVED ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The Conservatives have benefited politically also from recent improvements in Britain's economic condition. Two years ago the country was in the midst of a foreign exchange crisis brought on by nagging inflation and a resulting loss of confidence in the pound sterling. Gold and convertible currency reserves had fallen from the equivalent of \$3 billion in 1954 to \$1.85 billion in September 1957. Prices had risen about 4½ per cent annually in the same period. In mid-September 1957 the interest rate of the Bank of England was raised from 5 to 7 per cent, the highest since 1920. At the same time the Macmillan government announced it would hold its capital investment budget for the coming two years at the existing level instead of making planned increases of 10 to 12 per cent a year.

By early November 1957 it was clear that the Conservatives planned still further belt-tightening. Labor critics foresaw "a straight declaration of war" against the unions. Jo Grimond, parliamentary leader of the Liberals, chimed in that "The postures of industrial war are being taken up." Macmillan was accused of planning to treat inflation with a dose of unemployment.

A cabinet squabble over the budget resulted in the resignation on Jan. 6, 1958, of Peter Thorneycroft as chancellor

of the exchequer. Thorneycroft announced that he was quitting because Macmillan refused to pare welfare spending. The government's decision not to reduce family allowances or to increase National Health Service charges for medicines and other items was taken, it was explained, to discourage further wage demands.⁵ The price of such stability, Labor critics asserted, was stagnation.

While gold and foreign currency reserves mounted, so did unemployment. By November 1958 the number out of work in Great Britain had reached 536,000, the highest figure since before World War II. Prices, however, had become more stable. The total rise last year, 2 per cent, was the smallest since 1953. The currency reserve position, moreover, had improved to the extent that, effective Dec. 29, pounds held by non-residents of the sterling area were made freely convertible into other currencies.

Britain finished its fiscal year last March 31 with a surplus of slightly more than \$1 billion. The economic report presented to Parliament the following day by Chancellor of the Exchequer D. Heathcoat Amory purported to show that the country had emerged from recession into its biggest boom in years. Restrictions on bank loans, instalment buying and new capital issues were removed. The new budget, submitted April 7, cut the basic income tax rate from 42½ to 38¾ per cent and the corporation tax rate from 52½ to 48¾ per cent. Harold Wilson, who would be chancellor of the exchequer in a Labor cabinet, denounced the Macmillan government for neglecting the aged and the unemployed, and Aneurin Bevan called the budget "grossly immoral." But the political appeal of the budget was generally acknowledged. Moreover, unemployment was rapidly declining; by July it had fallen to 395,000.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERS IN COMING CAMPAIGN

The Conservative Party will go to the country hoping to outdo even its 1955 record of being the first government in 90 years to increase its majority at a general election. The optimism may be tempered by recollection of the British electorate's rejection of the Conservatives in 1945 despite the brilliance of Churchill's wartime leadership. Because of the way the British political system operates, personal popularity counts for far less than party programs in

⁵ Increases were made, however, in employer-employee health insurance contributions.

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election appeals. In Macmillan, however, the Conservatives have a leader who has been called "undoubtedly the cleverest politician to have emerged at Westminster in a quarter of a century or more."⁶

Not regarded when he assumed office as particularly forceful, Macmillan to the surprise of many has displayed a "special sort of firmness" refined by an "exquisite sense of timing."⁷ He has proved a great success at television campaigning, which will be more important than in previous campaigns.

Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, a favorite target of Labor M.P.s in Commons, improved his stature at the Geneva foreign ministers' talks. Aside from Macmillan, however, the biggest "name" asset of the Conservatives is likely to be D. Heathcoat Amory, the bachelor Treasury chief, who has acquitted himself with considerable skill since replacing Thorneycroft in January 1958.

Labor's top man is Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the party since 1955 and former chancellor of the exchequer in the Attlee Cabinet. A former economics professor, Gaitskell is the son of a civil servant, an intellectual with a cool manner and considerable debating skill. But the most formidable Labor campaigner is Aneurin Bevan, an ex-coal miner who would be foreign secretary if the party formed a government. As minister of health from 1945 to January 1951, he was responsible for setting up the National Health Service. When Bevan is at his best, a fellow Laborite has written, "there is no one who can so completely silence his opponents and grip everyone."⁸ But his several rebellions against the party leadership have made him perhaps the most controversial figure in British politics. Moreover, he is less at home in foreign policy matters than in domestic affairs.

Hopes of the once-powerful Liberal Party are higher today than they have been at any time since the war. A sharp increase in the Liberal vote has been indicated as a possibility by the public opinion polls from time to time. The Liberal leader is Jo Grimond, often called "the Adlai Stevenson of British politics" in light of his combination of intellectual ability, wit, and aristocratic background.

⁶ Alastair Buchan, "The New Shape of British Politics," *The Reporter*, Nov. 18, 1958, p. 17.

⁷ "Mr. Macmillan," *The Economist*, March 14, 1959, p. 942.

⁸ Fenner Brockway, quoted in Vincent Brome, *Aneurin Bevan* (1953), p. 11.

Elections Under the British System

AMONG many important differences between the British and American political systems, two are especially relevant to an understanding of British elections.⁹ The first is the overwhelming emphasis in the House of Commons on party responsibility and therefore on party cohesion. With every major parliamentary vote in effect a confidence issue,¹⁰ the British cannot afford to tolerate an American-style maverick sitting on one side of the aisle but voting with the other. Except within severe limits, members of Parliament are expected to support their party in any and all divisions or forfeit the party label. Adherents of the Parliamentary Labor Party, for example, may abstain from voting only "on matters of deeply held personal conscientious conviction."¹¹

Intra-party splits are not uncommon, especially in the Labor Party. Under exceptional circumstances, such splits may have powerful repercussions in Commons.¹² But as a general rule, party quarrels go on behind locked doors or outside Parliament altogether. The premium attached to party cohesion was shown by the November 1954 decision of the Parliamentary Labor Party to abstain entirely from voting on the Paris agreements regarding rearmament of West Germany. So profoundly at odds were major segments of the party on this issue that the P.L.P. could unite on no other course. Seven M.P.s who violated the abstention agreement were immediately expelled from the party. An equally striking incident was the "withdrawal of the whip" from Aneurin Bevan in March 1955. Bevan had clashed verbally with Clement Attlee, party leader, during

⁹ For differences in detailed procedures, see "British Election, 1950," *E.R.R.*, 1950 Vol. I, pp. 104-105.

¹⁰ Defeat on a relatively minor matter may lower the prestige of the government, but it does not necessarily require its resignation. In British constitutional practice, resignation is mandatory if the government loses on a no-confidence motion put by the Opposition or if it fails to carry a policy vote on which it has circulated a "four-line whip" or must-vote notice to its supporters.

¹¹ Standing orders of the Parliamentary Labor Party. The P.L.P. is "an autonomous political entity which . . . acknowledges its ultimate responsibility only to the electorate."—R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (1955), p. 385. The Labor Party is the mass organization supporting the P.L.P. The former's Tory equivalent is the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations.

¹² Thus Sir Anthony Eden, in the wake of the Suez intervention, was placed under immense pressure by his own backbenchers. Most observers doubt that he could have continued in office for long even if his health had held up. Related examples are the downfall of Neville Chamberlain in May 1940 and the celebrated break in the Labor Party in 1931 which resulted in Ramsay MacDonald's formation of a coalition government with Conservative and Liberal support but without the backing of the mass of his own party.

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a Commons debate. Only Attlee's personal intervention saved Bevan from expulsion by the Labor Party itself.

This tight code of discipline both sharpens the lines between parties and blurs the contribution, even the identity, of the individual M.P. The intrinsic result is that British politics tend to be issue-oriented rather than personality-oriented.

EMPHASIS ON PARTY RATHER THAN ON CANDIDATES

A second key element of the British political system reinforces and gives full scope to the first. The British voter, unlike the American, has only one means of directly influencing action on broad national issues. That is by choosing an individual—and, through this choice, the party—to represent him in Commons.

At the election on Oct. 8 no voter will be able to make a direct choice between Harold Macmillan and Hugh Gaitskell as Prime Minister. But in a larger sense every voter will make this decision before balloting. In this respect, British elections are more closely analogous to presidential than to congressional elections in this country, with the exception that personality plays relatively a much smaller role. It would be stretching things to suggest that the identity of local candidates matters as little in Britain as does the identity of presidential electors in the United States. But because the British voter can vote for only one candidate (not for both an executive and legislators) and because the candidate, if elected, is virtually obliged to follow his party leaders into the division lobbies, the views and qualifications of the individual running for office are far less of a factor than in American congressional elections. It is the party label that counts. In fact, experts on the British system generally agree that "a particular candidate, whatever his merits, is not likely to add or subtract more than about 500 votes to the total his party would win regardless of who had been nominated."¹³ Illustrative of the irrelevance of personality is the fate awaiting M.P.s who surrender their party label. Since 1945, not a single rebel has managed to win re-election as an independent.

Combined with party cohesion and the one-vote principle is a third factor, and in this case the British system

¹³ R. T. McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

parallels the American. Members of Parliament are elected from single-member districts (or constituencies) by plurality vote. From this practice flows an inflexible long-run pressure against third-party voting. It is the natural handicap under which any third party must operate in Britain, rather than the obsolescence of its political attitudes, which has reduced the Liberal Party of Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George to a mere corporal's guard in Commons.

British public opinion polls suggest that Liberal sentiment is considerably more widespread than election statistics indicate. Actually, as a party, the Liberals continue to do fairly well at the polls under one of two circumstances—when, in a dozen or so constituencies, a Liberal victory is a genuine possibility or when one of the two major parties is so thoroughly entrenched that a vote can be “wasted” in protest without affecting the result.¹⁴

It is not through direct political action, however, that the residual strength of Liberalism has been felt in recent years. The nearly even division between the major parties which has prevailed in Britain since 1950 has placed the key to electoral success in the hands of “floating voters”—independents of whom the ex-Liberals are the most articulate if not the most numerous. Such influential newspapers as *The (Manchester) Guardian* and the *London News Chronicle* maintain sentimental ties to Liberalism. But their major editorial efforts have gone toward staking out the shadowy boundary between “too much” state control and “too little.”

Both major parties have found it necessary to modify policy in a bid for middle-of-the-road support—Labor by de-emphasizing its doctrine of state ownership, the Conservatives by acknowledging the permanence of the welfare state and by restraining the enthusiasms of the party's Empire clique. The more militant elements of both parties have exhibited displeasure at this strategy, but failure to court the floating vote invites electoral disaster.

The long-run effectiveness of such tactics may be questioned. It was the close correspondence between Liberalism and Conservatism, as exemplified in the coalition

¹⁴ The Liberals won only 2.7 per cent of the total national vote in 1955, but they had only 110 candidates entered. The average Liberal vote in individual contests amounted to 15.1 per cent of the votes cast. “There was not a single case where either of the major parties could clearly blame Liberal intervention for the loss of a seat.”—David E. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

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of 1915-22,¹⁶ that gave the Labor Party its opportunity to overtake and later to crush the Liberal Party. The current lack of sharp policy differences between the two major parties has led some members of the small band of Liberal faithful to hope that they can again become an influential force. A group of young Liberals has gone so far as to predict that "the political struggle of the next quarter of a century" will be between the Liberals and the Laborites; "the Conservatives do not enter into it."

Few Liberals dare to aim so high. However, recent by-election results have encouraged some of them to believe that a revival is in the making. A Liberal candidate won the former Conservative seat at Torrington in south-west England in March 1958, the party's first by-election victory since 1929. Twice since then, Liberal candidates have cut deeply into normal Conservative majorities, in one case dropping the Labor candidate to third place in the poll.

Close students of British politics are careful to point out that performance in by-elections is not necessarily indicative of potential strength in a general election. Protest votes can be recorded at a by-election with relatively little risk. The Liberals felt so heartened by recent showings, however, that they are putting up some 220 candidates in this year's election, twice the number entered in 1955.

POSSIBLE RESULTS OF INCREASED LIBERAL ACTIVITY

Although it has been suggested that the Liberals might pick up enough seats to gain a balance of power in the House of Commons, a greater possibility is that stepped-up Liberal activity would alter the two-party balance by taking more votes from one side than from the other. A correspondent for the *London Times* pointed out last March 2 that of the 200 Liberal candidates named up to that time, only four could be rated as potential victors. However, a number were in position to affect the outcome. Twenty-five were entered in constituencies where the winner's margin in 1955 had been fewer than 3,000 votes (12 Conservative seats, 13 Labor) and 26 more in districts where the margin had been between 3,000 and 5,000 (18 Conservative, 8 Labor). Margins of more than 3,000 are

¹⁶ Austen Chamberlain, leader of the Conservatives in Commons from March 1921 to October 1922, hoped "to lead the Unionist [Conservative] Party to accept merger in a new party under the lead of (David Lloyd George) and including the great bulk of the old Unionists and old Liberals." The quotation is from a private memorandum from Chamberlain to Lloyd George, written in January 1922.—R. T. McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

considered relatively safe by most commentators. But this rule of thumb would not necessarily apply in case of a heavy third-party vote.

Just how serious the Liberal threat is in close constituencies it is difficult to say or even to guess. A majority of those constituencies were contested by the Liberals in 1955, and the narrow margins in that contest reflected the consequences of Liberal intervention. It is conceivable that a strong Liberal revival now could produce a switch in some of those districts. Experience in previous elections has been that Liberal candidates hurt Conservatives more than Laborites. David E. Butler has estimated that in 1955 the Conservatives lost 55 votes to the Liberals for every 45 votes surrendered by the Labor Party.¹⁶

An American elections specialist, Richard M. Scammon of the Governmental Affairs Institute, thinks that Butler's estimate may be slightly off balance because of heavy Conservative majorities in many of the constituencies analyzed. Scammon puts the Conservative loss at nearer 2 to 1, the same proportion suggested by the British Gallup poll. Past experience, of course, need not prove controlling in the coming election, particularly if some who normally give their votes to Labor but who really prefer the Liberals should feel that Labor has no chance of winning.

Campaign Issues in the British Contest

SINCE about 1948, when the Labor government elected in 1945 began to run out of momentum, British politics has been in a state of near equilibrium. Neither party has dared to venture very far from the body of commonly held opinions for fear of alienating the vital "floating voter" whose support is essential to electoral success. The result has been intense frustration for those in the Labor movement who believe that their party must go beyond the "position of making capitalism work."¹⁷ R. H. S. Crossman, a probable cabinet minister in a new Labor government, has stated the left-wing view as follows:

¹⁶ David E. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

¹⁷ R. V. Sampson, "The Dilemma of British Labor," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1952, p. 452.

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Under welfare capitalism: (i) Though the national income is rather more fairly distributed than before, the concentration of capital and so of economic privilege remains unchanged. (ii) Profits, wages and salaries are still determined not by any conditions of national interest or social justice, but by the traditional methods of *laissez-faire*. . . . (iii) Though certain basic industries are transformed into public corporations and private property is subject to some control, effective power remains in the hands of a small managerial and civil service elite. There can be no advance to socialism unless each of these three problems is honestly faced.¹⁸

Constrained to remember its socialist faith and yet faced with the practical fact of two successive defeats at the hands of the Conservatives, the Labor Party has found it difficult to develop a full range of policy proposals which would neither divide the party nor alienate voters.

NATIONALIZATION, EDUCATION, OTHER HOME ISSUES

The split on further nationalization of British industry is typical. The party promised in a policy statement last March to re-nationalize the steel industry, which had been de-nationalized by the Conservatives in 1953. Aneurin Bevan declared: "The steel industry will be taken back into public ownership . . . in a fashion that makes it stay in public ownership." At the party's annual conference in September 1958, however, proposals to nationalize land were decisively rejected. Former Minister of Agriculture Tom Williams warned: "To win power is our first duty. Anything in the nature of an unconsidered land nationalization proposal would not only wreck our chances at the next election but keep us in the political wilderness for a long time. Don't take a chance."

Frank Cousins, leader of the powerful Transport and General Workers Union, Britain's largest, nevertheless told his group on July 7: "We believe public ownership is an essential ingredient toward attaining real socialism. This union does not accept that any suggestion for buying our way into industry through shareholding [an approach put forward by Gaitskell] is any substitute for public ownership." The Labor Party has promised to "municipalize" rented houses—"one of the most important socialist projects ever embarked on in Britain," according to former party Chairman Tom Driberg—but it has gone slow on other proposals.

¹⁸ R. H. S. Crossman, "Towards a Philosophy of Socialism," in *New Fabian Essays* (1952), pp. 26-27.

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There has been some speculation that the Macmillan government, if reelected, will "de-nationalize several of the existing state-run industries."¹⁹ However, at the Conservative party conference last October, Minister of Power Lord Mills said only: "We must try, much as we dislike nationalization, . . . to make the nationalized industries a success." In opposition to Labor's municipal housing plan, the Conservatives propose simplified arrangements for financing home ownership. The party's current election manifesto or platform, issued Sept. 11, pledges government advances of £100 million (\$280 million) to building societies for loans to purchasers of houses; government rehousing of a million slum dwellers is promised in addition.

Both parties have outlined plans for improving welfare services. Labor would devote £100 million to building up the National Health Service by expanding group medical practice, constructing new hospitals, and eliminating all charges now made for medical service. The Conservatives would double present capital outlays for hospital construction and provide facilities for training additional social workers.

Perhaps the sharpest difference between the two parties on a domestic issue is in the field of education, where marks of Britain's age-old class-consciousness persist. Labor, seeking to expand educational opportunities for the less fortunate members of society, proposed to begin reorganizing secondary schools along lines of American-style "comprehensive" high schools and to abolish the so-called "11-plus" examination under which British children now are "tracked" at age 11 into college preparatory, technical or "practical" courses.

The Conservatives assert that "the grammar school"—which offers college preparatory work to approximately the top 25 per cent in the 11-plus examination—"will go if the Socialists win." Their educational program promises a one-third increase in the number of university students, a large expansion of training colleges for teachers, and expenditure of £400 million (\$1.1 billion) between now and 1965 to improve schools. Other prominent features of the Conservative domestic program include proposals to appoint a Minister for Science, to expand highway construc-

¹⁹ Geoffrey Goodman, "Labor Debates Nationalization," *The New Leader*, March 16, 1960, p. 10.

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tion, and to strengthen the central government's powers to deal with local unemployment.

LABORITES AND CONSERVATIVES ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

In matters of foreign affairs, Labor from time to time has advanced proposals for far-reaching changes in the policies of Great Britain and its allies. The Conservatives generally have confined themselves to endorsing the course of the Macmillan government. Labor's proposals, as applicable to major geographical areas, call for:

Europe: (1) Withdrawal of foreign troops from East and West Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

(2) Establishment of international control over the level and type of armaments and armed forces in the above zone of military disengagement.

(3) German reunification through free elections under plans mutually acceptable to the two Germanys.

(4) Negotiation of an all-European security treaty by Britain, France, the United States, and the U.S.S.R.

(5) Withdrawal of West Germany from NATO and of East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary from the Warsaw Pact.

Middle East: (1) Guarantee by the United Nations of all national boundaries, including those of Israel.

(2) Establishment of an Economic Council for the Middle East to combat poverty through wider distribution of oil profits.

(3) Renewed efforts to reach an Arab-Israeli settlement and to solve the Arab refugee problem.

Far East: (1) Admission of Communist China to the United Nations.

(2) Withdrawal of Nationalist troops from the offshore islands.

(3) Administration of Formosa under a United Nations trusteeship pending self-determination.

Africa: (1) Revision of voting rights in the Central African Federation to assure genuine African representation in the federal parliament.

(2) Prompt elimination of racial discrimination in all sectors of industry and education, and in social relations, in the Central African Federation.

Methods used in the policing of strife-ridden Nyasaland, in the Central African Federation, have been under particularly bitter Labor attack since the so-called Devlin report at the end of July found unsupported the British government's charge that African nationalists had plotted a massacre of European settlers.²⁰ Macmillan on July 21

²⁰ See "Power Struggles in Colonial Africa," *E.R.R.*, 1959 Vol. I, pp. 269-276.

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proposed setting up a commission to review the 1953 constitution of the Rhodesia-Nyasaland federation and to determine the framework best suited to achieve its objectives.

On nuclear disarmament, a matter of intense emotional concern to Labor because of its pacifist background, official party policy proposes that Britain take the lead in founding a "non-nuclear club," composed of all countries with the exception of the United States and the Soviet Union. Britain would give up nuclear weapons now in its possession if France and any other countries working to perfect atomic or hydrogen bombs agreed to refrain from all further research of that kind and leave nuclear weaponry solely to the two super-powers. This policy, virtually identical to that offered by the Liberals, represents an attempt by Labor leaders to compromise with the party's left wing, which has wanted Britain to renounce nuclear weapons unilaterally and to close British air bases to American planes armed with such weapons. The dispute has been an angry one, with the big Transport and General Workers Union among those opposing the party leadership. It is unquestionably one of the major sticks with which the Conservatives will belabor the opposition during the election campaign.

The Conservative election manifesto, lauding Macmillan's initiative in bringing about closer contacts among the great powers, proposed no radical changes in existing foreign policy. Of NATO it said: "We have sought to keep the alliance united on matters of principle and flexible in its diplomacy. For example, over Berlin we are resolved that the two and a quarter million West Berliners shall preserve their freedom to choose their way of life. Subject to that, we are ready to work out new arrangements to improve the existing situation." The manifesto advocated progress by balanced stages toward abolition of nuclear weapons and limitation of other weapons and of armed forces—all subject to "a proper system of international inspection and control."

LIBERAL PARTY'S GENERAL POLICIES AND PROMISES

Liberal party policy is for the most part couched in vague generalities. The party promises to "reform trade unions," to "end waste in state industries," and to "build up the colonies." Its agricultural statement, recently issued, was described by the independent *Economist* as standing "head

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and shoulders above its Conservative and Labor counterparts" in analysis; but it was short on proposals. In general, the Liberals stand for "partnership" in industry, rejecting state ownership; elimination of remaining class distinctions; free trade; coexistence; and an absolute end to colonial exploitation.

CONSEQUENCES FOR LABOR PARTY OF A THIRD DEFEAT

If the Labor Party is defeated in the coming election, the inevitable result will be a contest between left and right for control of the party apparatus. Some persons have speculated that "the Gaitskell [middle-of-the-road] mentality would be replaced by a more radical mood, and the party would then be recreated in opposition, ready for the time when opinion once more favors drastic change."²¹ The Liberals, on the other hand, hope that a third straight defeat for Labor would demonstrate the failure of the party's socialist dogmas and open the way for "a revived Liberal Party [to] take its place" as the principal opposition to the Conservatives.²²

British tradition and the British political system appear to leave no room for three-party politics. Nor is indefinite continuance in office of the Conservatives to be anticipated. Sooner or later the party now in power will be ousted. Whether it is succeeded by the Liberals or by Labor, by middle-of-the-rovers or by militant Socialists, will be of vital interest, not alone to Britishers, but also to Britain's partners in the Atlantic alliance.

²¹ Paul Johnson, "Shall We Help Mr. Gaitskell?" *New Statesman*, Jan. 17, 1959, p. 61.

²² Patrick Lort-Phillips, "The British Liberal Revival," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1959, p. 128.





